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The intellectual discourse on the ›stereotypology‹ of popular media, particularly of feature films, pervaded the entire twentieth century and oscillated between radical critique and renunciation, pragmatic appropriation, and postmodern celebratory revelation. These discourses refer to various concurrent and divergent meanings of ›stereotype‹ in the social sciences, linguistics and literary studies, art history, film and media studies. Thus, various concepts of stereotypes can be brought into play to investigate narrative films, especially film characters deemed to be based on different kinds of stereotypes. Each of these concepts conveys quite different methodological questions.[1]

Social psychology or anthropology linked ›stereotypes‹ particularly to schematized and conventionalized perceptions of the ›Other‹ as well as the ›Self‹ (hetero- and auto-stereotypes). When analyzing film narration, we need to consider how narrative figures interact with, and represent, such beliefs. This has been, and remains, the classic question in film analysis based on social psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, or the analysis of ideology. Pragmatic narratology might also find such a perspective meaningful. Social psychology conceives of ›stereotypes‹ as unsophisticated and fixed mental images of individuals belonging to certain groups. Such conventionalized notions, anchored in everyday cultural awareness, provide important points of reference for the narrative construction of fictional characters. For the experience of reception to work, it matters that a film and its characters, as the key factors of audience participation in the plot, are closely interrelated with everyday beliefs and values.

Apart from that, such referentiality also appears to work in the opposite direction: popular audio-visual narratives actively influence the audience's

1 For a comprehensive overview see the first chapter of Schweinitz: Film.

imagination, if only through visually reshaping and rendering the current cognitive schemata concrete, that is, providing a repertoire of evident visible patterns. For instance, Irmela Schneider has observed that the notions held by Germans about Americans (and the members of certain groups in the United States) are to a large extent determined by American television series and their visual representation of figural patterns.[2] The same holds true for feature films – particularly with a view to the pre-television age.

Such findings have prompted progressive attempts to lay open, differentiate, and correct the frequently emphasized reductiveness or distortedness of such conventional notions of the ›Other‹. Even projects like this rest upon the (hoped-for) active repercussion of films on audience disposition. Particularly in the 1970s and 80s, at a time when ideological critique was prevalent, this issue became important not only in film theory and criticism. Committed film-makers, such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, also made this the aim of their narration. Fassbinder sought to intervene in his audience's social imagination. In *Angst essen Seele auf* (Germany 1973), for instance, he attempted to uncover negative stereotypes, particularly about foreigners and minorities, bring these to public attention, and foreground their superficial, distorted nature. The character of Ali, a North African immigrant, is used to invoke the social stereotype which the film rejects, to sharpen it, and to demonstrate its absurdity through the cinematic staging of marked differences. As a sophisticated and likeable character, Ali affords the audience a powerful experience of the customary stereotype as an instance of impoverished, distorted, and indeed malicious social imagination. Put differently, Fassbinder applies cinematic narration to critique such stereotypes as crystals of false consciousness in the name of reality and humanity. *Angst essen Seele auf* is about the inhuman dynamics of social behaviour guided by ignorant stereotyping, in which almost all its characters are ensnared.

It is not accidental but rather part of the same discourse and sensibility, that in the 1970s and 80s a considerable number of film scholars, like Steve Neale,[3] wrote about the stereotypical images of the ›Other‹ and emphasized how films played with difference and criticized social patterns. Given such interest, it is even less surprising that many film scholars and those studying other narrative media, including Richard Dyer,[4] initially took up the notion of the stereotype as a *socio-psychological* category and linked it fairly directly to film characters. In such contexts,

2 Schneider: Theorie.
3 Neale: Story.
4 Dyer: Stereotyping.

the notion of the ›stereotype‹ is for the most part applied to film characters who quite evidently appear to be *narrative* embodiments of stereotypical images of the ›Other‹. For not only do such characters match the stereotypical perceptions of members of certain groups, but they are themselves *narrative*, that is, *aesthetic* constructs (because they are *conventionalized artifacts* reduced to some few conspicuous traits and subject to wholesale intertextual repetition). As Neale observes: »According to this problematic, a stereotype is a stable und repetitive structure of character traits«.[5]

This is where the topic of stereotype also comes into play as a *narrative mode*, or a ›mode of characterization in fiction‹ according to Dyer.[6] It does so not merely in terms of social psychology, but in a broader sense that shows – specifically with a view to narrative – how film characters are involved in the interplay of automatization and conventionalization on the one hand, and schemata and the reduction of complexity on the other. In this spirit Dyer closely examines the two-faced ›dumb blonde stereotype‹,[7] both as an everyday idea and a concrete character pattern of the cinematic-narrative imaginary, established in the 1930s and mainly influenced by American films featuring actresses like Jean Harlow or Marilyn Monroe.

In its attempt to understand stereotype-based perception and thought, social psychology contrasts the precise, unprejudiced, and patient observation of others with the rapid recourse to reduced and distorted conventional images operating as *pre*-judgments and replacing actual observation. It therefore stands to reason that a related, albeit specific antinomy prevails in aesthetic theory, dramaturgy, and narratology. Scholars working in these fields commonly distinguish individual characters from types when discussing narrative figures.

Individual characters only become gradually perceptible as a plot unfolds; they develop through interaction with the course of events and possess an individual and complex intellectual and psychological profile. Umberto Eco makes a similar distinction. Envisaging a character spectrum, he identifies at one end those who attain ›a complete physiognomy […] which is not merely exterior, but also intellectual and moral‹.[8] With

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5 Neale: Stereotypes, p. 41.

6 See Dyer: Stereotyping; see further Dyer: Images, esp. pp. 11–18: ›The Role of Stereotypes‹.

7 Dyer thus entitled a documentation for classroom use. See Dyer: Blonde.

8 Eco: Anwendung, p. 169. Eco refers to a special variety of the narrative character, which he calls ›type‹ and contrasts with ›character‹. Please note that this essay is not included in the partial English translation (Apocalypse Postponed) of Eco's *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964). All quotes are trans. by M.K.

reference to Lukács, Eco observes that ideally, such characters can attain an ›intellectual physiognomy‹,[9] which readers gradually recognize *as the actual goal of the reading process*. Such characters, he argues further, ›never exist prior to the work, but mark its success‹.[10] Narratives of this kind thus attempt to convey to their readers gradually developing, psychologically complex, multi-faceted characters. Such narration and individual characterization can be realized along similar lines in both literature and film.

At the other end of the spectrum, Eco detects schematically reduced characters, immediately recognizable on account of some few distinctive traits. Or as he notes, »[w]hen a person appears on the scene, they are already complete: defined, weighed, and minted«.[11] He cites Dumas' d'Artagnan, who lacks psychological complexity and all individual development, as an example. Once introduced, we learn nothing new about d'Artagnan over the course of the plot, beyond the exciting events for which he serves as a vehicle and which he experiences virtually unaffected:

> While his adventures afforded us excellent entertainment, we became aware that the author conveys nothing about him, and that d'Artagnan's adventures by no means determined him. His presence was accidental […] d'Artagnan serves as a pretext for the staging of events.[12]

Eco's argument prompts two observations. First, operating as a ›pretext‹ for the staging of events, such characters are not really accidental. Rather, their construction is precisely attuned to fulfilling a narrative *function*. That is, time and again, their specific attributes and the narrative programme attached to them enable and convey particular events and narrative procedures. Manfred Pfister has aptly called this the ›action-functional structuring‹ of the character.[13] Seen thus, d'Artagnan remains indeed unchanged by his adventures: true to his *narrative role*, which is determined from the outset, he is shaped through and through by his function to survive certain adventures. If he has any sense of self-actualization, it consists in the continual actualization of a pre-defined rule.

Secondly, a small set of particularly conspicuous, semantically unequivocal, and stable attributes enhances the poignancy of such characters beyond their characteristic traits by placing counterfigures to them – at times constant, at times alternating, but structurally similar in the latter

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9 Ibid., p. 171.
10 Ibid., p. 175.
11 Ibid., p. 173.
12 Ibid., p. 177.
13 Pfister: Drama, p. 234.

case. These antagonists are construed along similarly schematic lines. Pitting them against one another renders their characteristics even more apparent than type formation does anyway.[14] Besides, such distinctive traits enable readers and film spectators to readily attribute values and meanings, establish clarity, and thus advance the plot through the conflicts thereby generated.

Incidentally, the (figural) spectrum from individual characters to types as outlined here largely corresponds to E. M. Forster's distinction between ›flat‹ and ›round‹ characters:

> Flat characters were called ›humorous‹ in the seventeenth century, and are sometimes called types. […] In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round.[15]

For round characters ›cannot be summed up in a single phrase‹ and we remember them in connection with the scenes through which they ›passed and as modified by those scenes‹; round characters have ›facets like human beings‹.[16] Finally:

> The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It [the round character; J.S.] has the incalculability of life about it – life within the pages of a book.[17]

Referring to film, Dyer makes a very similar distinction to that of Forster and Eco, which he describes as opposition between ›novelistic character‹ and ›type‹,[18] and which I adopt here. He explicitly associates the socio-psychological ›stereotype‹ (the mental image of the ›Other‹) with ›type‹ (the figural construct in narrative fiction). Initially, Eco also referred to this second kind of character as a ›type‹ before shifting to ›topos‹. The latter refers beyond the reduced characterization and figural stability existing within a text. It also accentuates the feature of conventionality, or more specifically the intertextual mode of existence. Eco's ›topos‹ thus broadly overlaps with my *narrative sense* of the ›figural stereotype‹ as a conventional artifact:

> As useful and harmless as ›types‹ are, they function as a pattern of the human imagination […]. We should rather call them *topoi*, that is *places* that can be easily transferred into conventions and used effortlessly. The *topos* as a pattern of the human

14 See Asmuth: Dramenanalyse, pp. 96–98.
15 Forster: Novel, p. 67.
16 Ibid., p. 69.
17 Ibid., p. 78.
18 Dyer: Images, p. 13.

> imagination is employed excellently where […] a character recalled takes the place of a compositional act of the imagination; it relieves us […].[19]

While they stand in contrast to *individual characters*, no a priori coincidence between *types* and *figural stereotypes* (or Eco's *topos*) exists. Once established in a text, a type only becomes a narrative *topos* – and thus a figural stereotype in a narrative sense – when it has established itself *as a conventional figural pattern through repetition in the intertextual space of narration*.

Stereotyping a type once developed in a text is thus a second possible step. This *intertextual phase of type formation* brings forth an independent cultural fact, a conventional artifact of narrative imagination. For instance, the screen *vamp* – a type originally aligned through its external traits (particularly costume and make-up, but also habitus) with the tradition of the Italian diva – underwent its original cinematographic conventionalization through repeated performance in a considerable number of silent films. It thus became an established symbol of an audio-visual narrative imagination that maintains close relations with allegory and subsequently inspired a whole array of similar narratives.

Mostly, however, theoretical studies conceive of ›types‹ as fully fledged stereotypes. Scholars happily cite either the stock characters of the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* or the comparable array of seventeenth and eighteenth-century French stage characters as surviving and particularly striking examples.[20] Instead of nurturing the futile ambition to reform common usage, I merely wish to suggest that the formation of such fixed ›types‹, which characterizes the intertextual imaginary world of various genres (for instance, the Western or the ›cloak and dagger film‹), is a second, conventionalized phase of type formation, and thus an instance of the *narrative* stereotyping examined here.[21]

This distinction allows us to grasp Stanley Cavell's argument that narration in fully developed popular cinema rests upon types – rather than stereotypes:

> [T]ypes are exactly what carry the forms movies have relied upon. These media created new types; or combinations and ironic reversals of types; but there they were, and stayed.[22]

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19 Eco: Anwendung, pp. 178–179.

20 See Asmuth: Dramenanalyse, p. 88.

21 This is affirmed by etymology. Like ›stereotype‹, ›type‹ also derives from printing language. Originally a ›type‹ was the rectangular block usually of metal, bearing a relief character or so-called ›cliché‹ from which an inked print could be made. See Lausberg: Handbuch, § 901.

22 Cavell: World, p. 33.

Cavell then asks: »Does this mean that movies can never create individuals, only types?«[23] His response is bound to irritate anyone failing to distinguish between types and stereotypes:

> What it means is that this [creating types] is the movies' way of creating individuals: they create *individualities*. For what makes someone a type is not his similarity with other members of that type but his striking separateness from other people.[24]

What Cavell's claim amounts to is that with the advent of its classic phase popular cinema operates less with figural ›stereotypes‹,[25] that is, conventional constructs of *intertextually* repeated character traits and attributes – much like the ready-mades used in naive early silent film. Instead, he argues, it features *individualities*. For Cavell, such *individualities*, created in the individual film (or through a single, popular figure) arise particularly from their accentuated difference, their *striking separateness*, from other characters, particularly their buddies and antagonists but also people from the audience's everyday world. Besides, such reduced complexity and *intra*textual schematization engenders the necessary poignancy. To that extent, such *individualitie*s are not inevitably one and the same as *individual characters* in the above sense, but – as Cavell also observes – *types*, albeit *not* stereotypes.

Cavell's argument seems to underestimate the significance that unambiguous figural stereotypes or so-called ›established types‹,[26] together with more comprehensive conventionalization, have always assumed in the panoply of characters peopling Hollywood genres, particularly as regards the large repertoire of minor characters. Studies on stock characters in Hollywood cinema furnish such evidence, should this be necessary.[27] On the other hand, Cavell's theoretical distinction between *type* and *stereotype* establishes some clarity. For instance, it helps to distinguish between the original invention of a figural type and its later (potential) stereotypization. It also makes for a better description of the differences frequently existing between main and minor characters.

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23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Perhaps this has to do with the context of Cavell's argument, which adopts a critical stance toward Panofsky's claim that with the rise of the sound film the naive, determined iconography of *established* and visually easily recognisable types loses significance, since the audience no longer needs the explanation contained in the fixed type. Cavell takes up this argument, but objects: »Films have changed, but that is not because we don't need such explanations any longer; it is because we can't accept them«. (Ibid, p. 33.) This doesn't mean that types disappear, but only stereotypes, that is, *intertextually* determined types.

27 Loukides / Fuller: Stars.

As the previous discussion suggests, narrative figural stereotypes are not merely narrative-visual manifestations of normalized mental images of the ›Other‹ which social psychology approaches via the concept of the ›stereotype‹. *Two different aspects of stereotyping* can be distinguished as regards the interrelation of film characters and reality.[28] While these aspects partly come into contact and overlap, they also frequently merge but never wholly absorb one another.

The socio-scientific concept of the stereotype raises various questions (even though such approaches to film characters foreground social science and frequently cultural studies issues). For instance, which sociologically relevant cultural notions of the ›Other‹, of members of particular nations, professional groups, minorities, or other groups belonging to social reality does film represent or influence? Siegfried Kracauer's *National Types as Hollywood Presents Them*,[29] a study undertaken in the 1950s, examines a theme and adopts an approach both of which are characteristic of the interest taken by the social sciences in the representation of such beliefs. This concerns conventional and schematic everyday notions of *the* American, *the* Russian, *the* Turk, *the* African, *the* German – or in other contexts, *the* homosexual, *the* housewife, and so forth. Put differently, this concerns sociologically relevant schematic notions, which, however questionable, *claim a certain validity in the real world and determine attitudes toward such groups*. Such notions can guide practical action and directly affect social interaction, hence making them a preferred subject of both social science and political discourses.

What needs to be set apart here is the *narrative concept of the stereotype*. Primarily, this concerns neither the schematization nor conventionalization of sociologically relevant notions, but rather the *narrative depiction of fictional characters*. The focus thus lies on intertextually recurrent narrative schemata. In *cinematic* narration, these are characterized to a large extent by (audio-)visual concreteness, that is, recurring sensuous traits.

It could be argued that narrative and socio-psychological stereotypes – that is, normalized perceptions of the ›Other‹ – are closely linked. But such interrelation is neither imperative, nor are these two kinds of ›stereotypes‹ by any means congruent. On the one hand, films can take up socio-psychological stereotypes without, however, drawing upon cinematic-narrative ones. Stereotypical notions of the ›Other‹ can affect characterization, of course, but such delineation can be considerably more subtle through narration. Characters as such operate neither as *narrative* figural stereotypes nor as a fixed intertextual type of narration. Characters

28 The same applies to all kinds of fictional narration, not only the cinematic.

29 Kracauer: Hollywood, pp. 53–72.

who ›playfully sidestep‹ socio-psychological patterns can become ›reindividualized‹ on the surface over the course of narrative presentation. They are by no means rare in cinema.

On the other hand, a whole array of conventionalized intertextual types exists. Such narrative figural stereotypes have little in common with notions of the ›Other‹ associated more immediately with reality, nor do they shape attitudes toward the real world as a result. Instead, spectators consciously perceive and process such stereotypes as conventional patterns of the imagination.

This is possible, I argue, since narrative stereotypes can also take the shape of unequivocally imaginary figural constructs common in a particular genre. Above all, these claim validity within a certain narrative framework, that is, within specific imaginary worlds of narration. They refer precisely *not* (or at best highly indirectly) to the audience's immediate everyday world, and claim no validity in that world. My notion of ›imaginary worlds‹ echoes Wolfgang Iser's triade of ›the real, the fictive, and the imaginary‹.[30] I wish to emphasize that the narrative stereotypes occurring in fictional (and, by implication, cinematic) texts are geared much more frequently toward expressing what Iser calls ›phantasma, projections, and daydreams‹ than striving after a truthful representation of reality.[31] These imaginary worlds crystallize the crossing of boundaries of the imaginary from the diffuse and from the merely individual to the interpersonally structured fact, which comes into its own reality through having become conventional.

The need to distinguish these two concepts of the stereotype becomes particularly urgent when considering highly conventionalized genres like the Western. While the 1930s epic Western declared that its stories were about a real, albeit historical, world, it unmistakably resorted to mythical narration. No later (emphatically!) than the self-reflexive Spaghetti Western did audiences realize that they were party to a ritualized performance, which makes no meaningful reference to any facet of reality, but instead occurs in an utterly conventional, imaginary world. For instance, Sergio Leone's *C'era una volta il West* (Italy/USA 1968) explicitly indulges in parading key stereotypes from a genre-specific repertoire, as regards both characters, their patterns of actions, and various other dimensions of cinematic narration. Leone carries the stereotype mechanism (involving the reduction of complexity together with repetition) – also as regards character delineation – far beyond the limits already adopted during the classic phase of the genre. He thus lays bare

30 Iser: Perspektiven, p. 19; Frayling: Westerns, p. 194.
31 Ibid., p 21.

the stereotype mechanism in a self-reflexive manner, and *derealizes* the entire world of action and characters once and for all.

In his study of the Spaghetti Western, Christopher Frayling delineates this procedure and argues that Leone and Bertolucci, his scenarist, purposefully chose

> […] the most worn-out of stereotypes: the pushy whore, the romantic bandit, the avenger, the killer who is about to become a business man, the industrialist who uses the methods of a bandit. These stereotypes, which, in Leones' and Bertolucci's hands, become fictional ›emblems‹ of a sort, are taken from the dime novel, the Wild West show, the Hollywood film, the pulp magazine, the comic-strip, rather than from American history – parts of a ›fixed terminology‹ or ›code‹ of the fictional genre.[32]

The capitalist thus becomes a flashy type, extremely reduced outwardly and emblematically presented as a cripple harbouring fantasies of omnipotence. Forming part of a cinematic repertoire of stereotypes up to the present, this narrative stereotype recurs throughout film history, such as in the guise of Fritz Lang's banker Haghi (in *Spione*, Germany 1928), Stanley Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove (*Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, GB 1964), and many other instances, including Barry Sonnenfeld's Dr. Loveless in *Wild Wild West* (USA 1999). This garish character hardly denotes any ›true‹ story, but represents nothing other than an exalted token of an imagination conventionalized long ago – a genre's historical no-man's-land produced by conventionalization.

This example makes evident that while the social sciences define stereotypes as (more or less functional and more or less likeable) constructions of reality which have clear consequences for thought and action in *everyday life*, narratological stereotypes foreground a relatively autonomous construct, which is valid only within fictional worlds, understood as *conventional intertextual worlds of the imagination*. No one would consider Leone's stereotypical characters to have validity beyond the confines of the cinema. Social science studies which somewhat rashly sought to deduce from this *the* ›image of the industrialist‹, prevailing in everyday human imagination and associated with reality, came to nothing since such characters are nothing other than pawns in a ritualised game.

Lubomír Doležel, a leading theorist in the field of fictional-worlds theory, in this sense emphasizes ›the sovereignty of fictional worlds‹,[33] and adds: »Mimetic reading, practiced by naïve readers and reinforced by journalistic critics, is one of the most reductive operations of which the human mind is capable: the vast, open, and inviting fictional universe is shrunk to the

32 Frayling: Westerns, p. 194.

33 Doležel: Heterocosmica, p. 18.

model of one single world, actual human experience«[34]. Doležel refers to the philosophical framework of possible-worlds semantics.[35] In this sense he gives the definition:

> Fictional worlds of literature […] are a special kind of possible world, they are aesthetic artifacts constructed, preserved, and circulating in the medium of fictional texts.[36]

In concluding his definition he touches on the second phase of establishing fictional worlds in the interpersonal repertoire of the imaginary. This phase is based on the *intertextual* repetition of central constituents of one of these worlds in a multiple of texts, for example of a genre. Also from this intertextual aspect, Doležel's description of fictional worlds makes sense as ›ensembles of nonactualized possible states of affairs‹.[37]

However, these two kinds of stereotypes – the socio-scientific and the one merely holding true in intertextual fictional worlds, i.e. in the worlds of conventionalized imagination – are not always as easily distinguishable as in the above instances. Distinction is often complicated by the fact that film spectators and readers can hardly ever draw a sharp line between even decidedly imaginary narrative worlds and their imaginary constructions of the real world. After all the latter also comprise a considerable number of imaginary moments (not least determined by media). Besides, both ›kinds‹ of stereotypes often overlap or become intertwined. I therefore referred to *aspects*, which occasionally tend to converge in one and the same character, particularly if this character functions as a stereotype in a narrative sense (or as conventional type) *and* embodies a socially relevant stereotypical notion of the ›Other‹.

The militaristic German, whom Erich von Strohheim, among others, established as a narrative stereotype in American cinema, comes to mind. While following culturally established notions, it engendered a separate narrative template, a type soon conventionalized, a ›mask‹. On account of its latently comical sharpening, its habitus, and some few ostentatiously flaunted attributes, it began to lead its own cinematic life within the conventional sphere of playful imagination. Among others, this independent existence became apparent in that, as a comedy stereotype, the conventional type of narration could oscillate toward the amusing and

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34 Ibid., p. x

35 Elaborating further, he, however, places value on emphasizing the specific character of fictional worlds in relation to the possible worlds of logic and philosophy, and articulating features ›that are special for the fictional worlds of literature, that is, those features that cannot be derived from the possible worlds model‹ (ibid., p. 16).

36 Ibid., p. 16.

37 Ibid.

almost likeable, although the socio-psychological stereotype upon which it originally rested was distinctly negative.

Being able to obtain this independent existence, based on ›de-realization‹, is typical of narrative figurations once conventionalized. Such independence recurs in the shape of the stereotypical Soviet official – see, for instance, the corresponding characters in Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* (*Ninotschka*, USA 1939) and Billy Wilder's *One, two, three* (USA 1961) – or the stereotypical psychiatrist – see, among others, Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds goes to town* (USA 1936), Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* (USA 1980), and Ethan and Joel Coen's *The Hudsucker Proxy* (USA 1994). Another case in point is the ›drunken journalist‹, as Howard Good's ›biography‹ of this film stereotype shows.[38]

The gradual conventionalizing of a pattern coincides with a tendency toward ›de-realization‹. Thus characters who at first appear as possible representations of reality become puppets in what is an obvious game, to the extent that they become conventional quantities. In this sense, Jurij Lotman, who speaks of an ›aesthetic of identity‹ which is based upon ›model clichés‹,[39] thus remarked on the *comedia dell'arte*:

> The unpitying nature of Italian (and not only Italian) folk theatre is organically connected with its *conventionality*. The audience remembers that these are puppets or maskers on the stage and perceives their death or suffering, beatings or misfortunes, not as the death or suffering of real people, but in a spirit of carnival and ritual. Germi's films would be unbearably cynical if he invited us to see real people in his characters.[40]

If we can neither sharply delineate nor systematize the ramified interactions between these aspects, it nevertheless makes sense to distinguish them. While the socio-psychological concept of the stereotype rests upon social pragmatics, narrative stereotypes are pragmatic quantities of narration and of narrative imagination.

They shape the imaginary and allow it to become ›real‹ as an *open imaginary construct*, that is, a fixed quantity of communication. Stereotypical characters, such as the adventure film's *swashbuckler* or stock Western and science fiction characters, are ›fairy tale figures‹, that is, fixed masks of the imagination. We would be grossly misinterpreting them if we rashly conceived of such characters as ›images of the ›Other‹ related to reality, or criticized them for falling short of it.[41] Audiences expect such characters to appear solely in an imaginary, intertextually constituted *genre-specific setting*. Within the conventional networks of existing genres, they are

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38 Good: Journalist.

39 Lotman: Struktur, p. 410.

40 Lotman: Semiotics, p. 22 (my emphasis).

41 Claiming as much doesn't amount to denying any connection with certain conventional notions aimed at immediate reality.

appreciated as sedimentary schemata, as stereotypes of narration, and as ritual quantities. If they were missing therein or subject to fundamental change, this would not only cause irritation but also possibly impair, if not explode, the genre in question. The relationship between such patterns and the audience's everyday world is effectively rather indirect (except for adolescent misconceptions). It is mostly a highly mediated relationship, amounting *in the final instance* to one which *all* imagination entertains with the real world.

Audience expectations as regards genre-specific worlds stem from the fact that as narrative forms figural stereotypes are oriented toward receptive dispositions – and, by implication, toward a desire for the imaginary. Such stereotypes operate neither as realistically understood representations nor as vehicles of immediate real world knowledge, but as personal instances of a repeatable increase in pleasure within a ritualized, self-resembling game continually offered anew by the individual films of a specific genre. It is appropriate to assign these stereotypes serious functions for the kind of narration chosen and its coordination with common cultural dispositions. The successful realization of these functions affords them shape and their form gradually becomes sedimented in the intertext.

Incidentally, such pragmatic thinking proves worthy far beyond the narrative stereotypes of the ›banal‹ genre film. With a view to art history, Ernst Gombrich advocated a similarly pragmatic approach to aesthetic facts, among which he included conventional stylistic forms and means:

> As long as painting is conceived as serving a human purpose, one has a right to discuss the means in relation to these ends.[42]

Gombrich also observed the effect of the ›idea of an ›economy of means‹ in classical works.[43] He further asserted that ›the element of a problem solution‹ belongs to art and proceeds through recourse to an array of recurring specific requirements.[44] The narrative figural stereotypes of film, that is, *types conventionalized through repeated use*, can be interpreted as one of the narrative solutions ›found‹ in the cinematic world of characters. They can be considered *pragmatic quantities of a context- and function-bound standardization of narration*, as *recurrent*, *conventional narrative patterns*.[45]

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42 Gombrich: Norm, p. 96.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 98.
45 Trans. by. Mark Kyburz.

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